



## **Safe Winter Driving Tips Nov. 2004**

Our winter driving season is rapidly approaching. It's amazing how many of us quickly forget our winter driving skills. For example, we all should know that you cannot stop as fast on an icy or snow-covered road as you can on dry pavement, and that often the most slippery surfaces do not appear hazardous, like on bridges, overpasses, and underpasses. At intersections the moisture emitting from the exhaust of cars waiting at a traffic light quickly freezes on the pavement and can be especially hazardous. And don't be overly confident if your vehicle has anti-lock brakes; they are no substitute for using caution when traveling on slippery roads.

Just as important as good driving skills, however, are some commonsense issues that could save your life in the event you become broken down or stranded. A good place to start is with some "preventive maintenance."

Make sure your car is in good mechanical condition. Temperature extremes always bring out the worst in your car, soft tires, gasoline freeze, and carburetor and heating problems. Make sure that your antifreeze is at the proper level and that your wiper blades are new and your washer reservoir is full. Cold weather is especially hard on your battery, take the time to keep the battery terminals clean and if the battery is more than three years old, take it to a qualified technician and have it load tested before it really gets cold this winter. Don't assume your tires will make it another winter either. Here's a good tip, take a penny and stick it into the tread (head first), if you can see Lincoln's head, it's time to invest in new tires. At the very least, get your tires checked at a reputable tire dealer.

Have you washed your windshield lately? ---and I don't mean with the wipers. Take the time to hand wash your windshield, windows all the way around, mirrors and lights. Keep an extra bottle of washer solvent in the trunk just in case you happen to run out like we all do at times. Driving down the highway with your head out the window will cause your lips to chap. Remember that an ounce of prevention will go along way on a cold winter's night.

Prepare an emergency kit for your car. Include things that prepare you for the unexpected -- what would you need if you found yourself stranded miles from help during a snowstorm? Include things like warm clothing, boots, stocking cap, gloves or mittens, flashlight with fresh batteries, flares, small shovel, sand or kitty litter, blankets, and fresh first-aid supplies. You may also want to include candy bars or other nutritious snacks, as well as a supply of small candles and matches to light them with. A single lit candle in your vehicle can provide warmth that will help you survive for many hours, and with precautions is much safer than letting the engine run.

Don't forget the cure for a frozen lock. Carefully heating the end of a key with a match or a lighter will work most of the time. A squirt of de-icer spray that you can purchase at most gas stations and store it in your glove box is another quick method.

During inclement weather let people know where you are going, your route of travel, and when you expect to arrive. Cell phones are a great safety insurance against breakdowns and getting stranded -- but they do little good if you don't know where you are! Stay alert and know precisely where you are at all times in the event you need to call for help. Watch for road signs and landmarks.

Michigan NETS would like to remind you to use caution this winter and always plan ahead. Keep your eyes on the road, never drink and drive, and always wear your safety belt and remember, kids always in the back.

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## More Winter Driving Tips

There are almost as many opinions as to how to drive safely on ice or snow as there are automobiles. Most crashes occur when you don't expect the surface of the road to be slippery. Many people get into trouble by assuming the roads will not be slippery unless the temperature is freezing or below. Ice can form on road surfaces, however, anytime the air temperature drops to 40 degrees or less, especially when it is windy. Bridges and underpasses can be especially hazardous, but these are not the only locations "black ice" can form. Any low or shaded area, area surrounded by landscape, or area that has a source of water running over the pavement can also be quick to form ice. Early morning hours are especially dangerous, as the moisture has had an opportunity to sit on the cold pavement and freeze.

Others find themselves in trouble during the winter while driving on roads seemingly clear or only slightly wet, and then try to stop at an intersection only to discover that it is ice-covered and slippery. This is caused by the moisture emitting from the exhaust of cars waiting at a busy intersection and quickly freezing on the pavement. Always approach intersections cautiously.

Some other basic safety tips for winter driving include allowing extra time to arrive at your destination. Slow down and be alert for other vehicles around you that may lose control, and allow at least 4 seconds between vehicles. It is also recommended that you allow no less than a car-length in front of you when you are stopped behind another vehicle at a slippery intersection, and then watch your rear-view mirror for cars that may approach you too fast from behind. Often this extra margin of safety will allow you to pull forward in the event that an approaching vehicle begins to slide. If the intersection is slippery you can signal other drivers to the danger by turning on your hazard flashers.

If you find yourself beginning to slide on snow or ice, **DON'T PANIC**. Take your foot off the gas and **DO NOT** hit the brakes. Steer the front of your vehicle **into the skid** (the same direction you are sliding). This technique is used in both front- and rear-wheel-drive vehicles. If you must use the brakes, do not allow them to lock up; gently pump the brake pedal, unless your car is equipped with anti-lock brakes. If your car has anti-lock brakes, use a firm, steady pressure **WITHOUT** pumping. The grinding noise you hear and the surging you feel in the pedal is normal and indicates the brakes are working properly, allowing you to continue to steer and control the vehicle. And for you 4-wheel-drive enthusiasts, always remember that a 4-wheel-drive vehicle provides additional traction that is useful for going through deep snow, but it **does not** stop any faster.

Never ever start your car in a closed garage or idle your engine with the windows closed. Carbon monoxide, which is present in exhaust fumes, is almost impossible to detect and can be fatal. Remember to always keep fresh air moving.